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ABSTRACT

The transformation of education and the formation of social capital in Texas has been brought about by local organizations of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, or the Texas IAF. The organizations have operated in innercity neighborhoods to develop mutually reinforcing matrices of school improvement and community uplift. By 1992 Texas IAF organizations had developed a partnership with the Texas Education Agency to create a network of 20 "Alliance Schools." This paper describes the manner in which Texas IAF organizations built social capital in the Alliance Schools and their surrounding communities in one city in Texas. The paper first briefly describes the purpose, internal structure, and methods of community organization of the Texas IAF. The next section describes the Texas IAF's politics of education in San Antonio, the city in which IAF organizations have most transformed both the power structure of the city and the operating processes of the public schools. The next section critiques the Texas IAF's school work and suggests ways in which that work can inform and enrich social capital theory. The paper sketches out a vision and practice of citizenship organization that can counteract America's declining social capital through tenacious forms of neighborhood and school improvement in the nation's central cities. (19 footnotes.) (LMI)

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TEXAS' ALLIANCE SCHOOLS:

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL CAPITALIZATION

IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

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Rice University
1996

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DRAFT: NOT FOR CITATION

Assume that we accept the essence of the arguments assessing social decapitaliza-tion that were advanced by Robert Putnam in his essay, "Bowling Alone," and the foregoing contributions to this anthology. If we concur that the data persuasively demonstrate a withering of social capital in the United States--as exhibited in the decline of social trust, participation in voluntary associations, and manifestations of civic participation such as voting--it follows for friends of democratic governance that citizens, social scientists, and policy makers should make every effort to develop countervailing strategies of social capital formation. Educators have cause to be especially engaged with this problematic, for many of the symptoms of social decapitalization have direct and daily repercussions in the classrooms and corridors of American schools. When children have only parent in the home to supervise schoolwork rather than two; when parents' participation in PTAs plummets over a twenty-five year period and they are disconnected from the daily lives of their children in schools; when millions of "latchkey" children are unsupervised every afternoon when they return home from school; when high mobility rates make it difficult for parents to feel a connection between

their school and community: then all of these phenomena combine to provide less concerted and systemic adult sponsorship of children, with a consequential need for educators in schools to take up the enculturating tasks of the home and community and less time to devote to children's intellectual development.[1]

Even if one concurs in identifying symptoms of social decapitalization, however, the search for remedies is by no means self-evident. This is particularly true because social capital theory appears to claim an uncertain middle ground between conservative and liberal (and radical) political theory. The former often entails a critique of efforts by the state to rectify economic injustices through governmental policies; the latter entails a critique of the market for corroding social relationships in the single-minded pursuit of profit maximization. By shifting attention to an intermediate and semi-autonomous terrain--that of culture and civil society--social capital theory opens up a new dimension of civic life, which can be reduced to neither state policy nor economic determinism. So far so good. But the question still remains: what kind of political strategy might emerge from an analysis grounded in social capital theory and seeking a rectification of the many problems which now confront American education, and public schools in particular?

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[1] Robert Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America"s Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 6, no. 1, January 1995, pp. 65-78. My account of the Texas IAF's work in schools is necessarily schematic in this brief essay; an expanded version may be found in Dennis Shirley, *Laboratories of Democracy: Community Organizing for School Reform* (Austin: University of Texas, 1997). I would like to thank Zenaido Camacho, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Howard Gardner, Jeffrey Henig, Marvin Hoffman, Allen Matusow, Deborah Meier, Robert Putnam, Seymour Sarason, Ted Sizer, and Gary Wehlage for their comments and criticisms of my writings on this topic.

One kind of answer to these lines of inquiry is theoretical and would articulate ideal-typical characteristics of a civic strategy of social capital formation. In this essay, I pursue a different line of investigation, in which I describe the development of urban schools through the efforts of community-based organizations in Texas. Consider four examples of social capitalization that have challenged intolerable situations in inner city schools and neighborhoods:

1. An African-American principal in Fort Worth is terrified by the prospect of taking over a middle school known for severe discipline problems and low academic achievement. Desperate to find allies, she begins visiting black churches in south Fort Worth and appealing to clergy and congregations for assistance. On the first day of school her worst nightmares are realized when she discovers that a firebomb was thrown through a window in the front office of the school the previous evening. She persists in her efforts to build community support, however, and clergy and community organizers spend one intensive year visiting parents and recruiting their participation. The parents respond and begin devoting hundreds of hours of work to tutoring their children at home and battling neighborhood blights such as grocery stores that previously sold alcohol to their underaged children. The principal credits the parents' newfound engagement with their children's learning with vastly improved discipline and a spectacular leap in academic achievement: her school's standardized test scores catapult from twentieth to second in middle schools in her district in the two years after the firebombing.

2. A Mexican-American boy in the impoverished *Segundo Barrio* of El Paso suffered a brain tumor when he was five years old and lost sight in one of his eyes when it was operated on.

He is a special education student who can learn when under the guidance of patient and nurturing teachers, but who otherwise faces tremendous cognitive challenges. While he was at his elementary school, his innovative principal worked with a community-based organization to build strong ties between the school and the community; the principal met with parents in their homes on a weekly basis to discuss strategies for improving their children's learning. Once the boy enters middle school, however, he misses such a vibrant supportive network and experiences the castigation of an abusive teacher who tells him that he is stupid and lazy in front of his peers. The boy's mother confronts the teacher, who refuses to apologize. She then discusses the situation with other parents at a house meeting for the elementary school, and learns that many other parents have had similar bad news from the school, which routinely flunks close to half of its seventh and eighth graders. The boy's mother joins with other parents in confronting the school board (in a statement in Spanish) at a school board meeting; the board conducts its own investigation which validates the legitimacy of the parents' grievances. As a result of the parent's action the principal of the school is reassigned, all of the teachers have to reapply for their positions, and the parents play a major role in recruiting a new principal and new teachers.

3. An inner city elementary school in a Mexican-American neighborhood in Austin has been plagued for years by low attendance, low teacher retention, and low student achievement. A community-based organization agrees to work with the school to raise parental involvement. After struggling for months with no palpable results, school and community leaders discover that a local public health clinic will be relocated to the north side of town. Teachers and parents use the impending loss of the clinic as an opportunity to organize the community to

create a health clinic for children in the school. Parents and teachers face angry opposition from religious fundamentalists, who fear that the clinic will be used to disseminate birth control information and devices, but the school board votes to support the clinic when clergy allied with the community-based organization speak out on behalf of the clinic. The principal and teachers of the school use that victory to catalyze higher levels of parental involvement in the school, and academic achievement skyrockets.

4. An inner city high school in an African-American neighborhood in Dallas has been plagued by low academic achievement, high drop out-rates, and frightening incidents of violence for years. Community organizers work with the principal and teachers to institute a form of block scheduling which promotes in-depth learning in classes of ninty-minute length rather than forty-five minutes; he also develops a drop-out prevention program which results in dramatic increases in attendence. After a student in the school is killed in an altercation, community leaders work with the principal, parents, students, teachers, and custodians in the school to address the paralyzing state of fear which makes learning impossible. After a year of agitation and dialogue between all of the major stakeholders in the community, the percentage of students passing the reading, writing, and mathematics components of the state's standardized tests jumps from thirteen percent to forty percent.

Each of the above incidents represents a manifestations of educational transformation and social capital formation in the urban Southwest, wrought predominantly (but not exclusively) by local organizations of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, or the Texas IAF. Founded by Saul Alinsky in Chicago over fifty years ago, the IAF has developed its strongest organizations nationally in Texas in the last twenty years. In the past decade those

organizations have brought their values, methods, and resources to inner city neighborhoods with the intention of developing mutually reinforcing matrices of school improvement and community uplift. By 1992 Texas IAF organizations had developed sufficient success in a number of urban schools to develop a partnership with the Texas Education Agency to create a network of twenty "Alliance Schools" which would formalize the partnership between the state's department of education and Texas IAF organization. Alliance Schools receive special funding by the state and waivers for innovative programs are expedited by the TEA. By 1995 the IAF and Texas Education Agency had approved over sixty schools in the Alliance network, and the Texas legislature--which is not exactly known for its historical commitment to public education--designated over five million dollars over a two year period to expand the work of public schools which collaborate with community-based organizations.[2]

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[2] Readings on the Industrial Areas Foundation include Saul D. Alinsky, *Reville for Radicals* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1947) and *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971); Marion K. Sanders, *The Professional Radical: Conversations with Saul Alinsky* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970); John Hall Fish, *Black Power/White Control* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Robert Bailey, Jr., *Radicals in Urban Politics: The Alinsky Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Ed Chambers, *Organizing for Family and Congregation* (New York: Industrial Areas Foundation, 1978); Joan E. Lancourt, *Confront or Concede: The Alinsky Citizen-Action Organizations* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979); Carl Tjerandsen, *Education for Citizenship* (Santa Cruz, CA: Emil Schwarzhaupt, 1980), pp. 233-330; Harry C. Boyte, *Commonwealth: A Return to Citizen Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1989); the Industrial Areas Foundation, *IAF: 50 Years: Organizing for Change* (Franklin Square, NY: n.p., 1990); Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky--His Life and Legacy* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Jim Rooney, *Organizing the South Bronx* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). On the Texas IAF, see Mary Beth Rogers, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas, 1990); the Texas IAF Network, *Vision, Values, Action* (Austin: Texas IAF Network, 1990); William Greider, *Who will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (New York: Simon &

This essay describes the manner in which Texas IAF organizations build social capital in the Alliance Schools and their surrounding communities in one city in Texas. First, I describe briefly the purpose, internal structure, and methods of community organizing of the Texas IAF. Second, I provide an extended description of the Texas IAF's politics of education in San Antonio, the city in which IAF organizations have most transformed both the power structure of the city and the *modus operandi* of the public schools.. I then offer a critique of the Texas IAF's school work and suggest ways in which that work can inform and enrich social capital theory. The intention is to sketch out a vision and practice of citizenship organization that can counteract America's declining social capital through tenacious forms of neighborhood and school improvement in the nation's central cities.

The Texas IAF's Politics of Education

The organizations of the Texas IAF exist to enhance the growth of low and moderate-income citizens' capacities to develop into effective public actors. They do not exist to create new programs, or to raise money for worthy purposes, although they may do all of these things as byproducts of capacity enhancement. The organizations are supported by dues paid by religious institutions which see it as within their self-interest to have congregations whose members can enhance the conditions of their central city neighborhoods. Twelve organizations now exist in eleven regions in Texas. Catalyzed by the Texas IAF, parents,

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Schuster, 1992), pp. 222-241; Ernesto Cortés, Jr., "Reweaving the Fabric: The Iron Rule and the IAF Strategy for Power and Politics," in Henry G. Cisneros, ed., *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), pp. 294-319; Peter Skerry, *Mexican Americans: The Ambivalent Minority* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

teachers, principals, clergy, parishioners, police officers, bankers, and realtors have come together in a startling array of collective actions which have enhanced both their own lives and those of inner city children. The politics of the Texas IAF are defiantly nonpartisan and focussed on the immediate needs of predominantly working-class citizens.

Each Texas IAF organization consists of leaders and organizers who set policy, take action, and hold elected officials accountable. Policies for the organizations are determined largely through a strategy of house meetings in neighborhoods in which local residents come together to speak out on the issues that most concern them. The IAF is founded on the premise that people in a community can solve their own problems, given the requisite training and leadership development. Common phrases in IAF circles are that the IAF is an "organization of organizations" and a "confederation of congregations." Although the number of congregations will vary from city to city, the Texas IAF aspires to be broad-based in its membership. In Austin, for example, the Texas IAF organization's congregational base is one-third Catholic, one-third Baptist, and the final third is made up of non-Baptist Protestant denominations and Jewish congregations.

Texas IAF organizations focus their efforts on low-performing schools in low-income neighborhoods and develop a clear strategy to increase parental engagement in them. Texas IAF leaders and organizers only target schools to transform which are deeply troubled but which have a fighting chance of turning themselves around. "Deeply troubled" here refers to problems associated with America's inner city youth, including low test scores, high dropout rates, gangs, lack of personal safety, and a high number of single-parent households--all in a state with the highest adult illiteracy rate in the nation. To refer to "deeply troubled" schools

in the Texas context is to refer to schools in neighborhoods in which many parents have had little formal education, have had negative experiences with schools themselves, and see schools as opposed to the culture of the home.

In this social context, how does one transform a school culture from one of distrust and bureaucracy to one of openness and change? In the case of Texas IAF organizations, it is important to emphasize the role that history plays. Texas IAF organizations now have over two decades of involvement in Texas politics and have marshalled a great deal of public support through issue-oriented politics. By avoiding divisive ideological positions, and by focussing on visible, concrete improvements--such as providing storm sewers and traffic signs, shutting down crack houses, and securing better police protection--the Texas IAF earned political power years before it began its school-related work. "We have people trained now so they feel comfortable going into City Hall and talking to the officials," San Antonio IAF leader Father Rosendo Urrabazo said in 1990, "But they don't feel comfortable going into the schools. What we did in City Hall, we have to do now in the schools." The hard-won political legitimacy of the Texas IAF, forged in two decades of struggle, has greatly facilitated the Texas IAF's entrance into schools and given it multiple entry points to influence educational policy.[3]

The Texas IAF's approach to power and community organizing is contingent upon the most salient issues which confront any particular neighborhood and school at a specific point in time. Given the local and situational approach to school improvement characterizing Texas

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[3] William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 231.

IAF collaboratives, a predetermined approach to school reform--one entailing an externally-created and imposed checklist of prioritized goals, for example--would be wholly inappropriate. Texas IAF leaders and organizers bristle at the notion that substantial school reform consists of new programs, and are much more intrigued and motivated by the enhancement of political capacity that can change school cultures. Programs are but one subsidiary part. "We think our primary task is developing leadership," Texas IAF director Ernie Cortés said, "not just resolving some problem, not just doing good." [4]

The key manifesto of the Texas IAF is its "vision paper,"*The Texas IAF Vision for Public Schools* , composed and approved at an assembly of statewide delegates in 1990. The paper commences with an affirmation of the Texas IAF organizations' political achievements and their normative grounding in the dual traditions which frame American society: "They have defended the biblical tradition that a society will be judged by its compassion for the weak and solidarity with the poor. They have defended the republican tradition that extreme inequality threatens community." By extending norms of compassion, solidarity, and democracy to schools, the essay states, "The Texas IAF network shares with the early democrats of our nation a commitment to democratic education and pluralism." No historical myopia is at play: "Public schools first excluded blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans entirely, then segregated them into inferior institutions." Nonetheless, "the tradition of the

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[4] Linda Rocawich, "Interview: Ernesto Cortés, Jr.," *Texas Observer*, 22 November 1990, vol. 82, no. 23, p. 11; Texas Interfaith Education Fund, "The Texas IAF Vision for Public Schools: Communities of Learners," (Austin, TX: unpub. ms., 1990). On the Texas IAF convention which ratified the vision paper, see Greider, *Who Will Tell the People*, pp. 226-233.

democratic 'common school' remains essential to our conception of public schools to this day."

After providing a historical and axiological groundwork for community organizing, *The Texas IAF Vision for Public Schools* recognizes the "alarming future" that confronts American youth. The academic achievement of the young is mediocre in an increasingly competitive and materialistic world. The social lives of young people are undermined by weak families, widespread violence among juveniles, and the prevalence of substance abuse. The schools of the young typically prepare them "to be punctual, docile, and adept at routine tasks" while transformations in the global economy demand workers who are restlessly inquisitive, intellectually independent, and socially proactive.

The Texas IAF's vision paper proposes a triple revolution for public schools. First, it calls for a transformation of the kind of learning that transpires in schools from an emphasis upon memorization and standardization to critical thinking, collaboration, and alternative forms of assessment. Second, the paper promotes a development of school organization from centralization and bureaucracy to decentralization and democracy. Third, it advocates a transformation of community relations from marginalization and exclusion to participation and empowerment.[5]

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[5] On the historical origins of "factory schools," see Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962); Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp.151-179; Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Miflin, 1985), pp. 233-308; and Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987). Some of the best recent criticisms include Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); Linda M. McNeil, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge*

The originality of the Texas IAF contribution does not stem from its critique of the factory school or its proposals regarding instruction, curriculum, and assessment. Virtually every major school reformer in the country now advocates similar proposals in those areas as does the Texas IAF. Schools that collaborate with the Texas IAF experiment with portfolio assessment, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and child-centered pedagogies in a manner entirely congruent with those grass-roots reforms which have done so much to enliven and improve American education in the last decade. The unique feature of the Texas IAF approach, which gives its collaboratives an entirely different feel and nuance, lies in its unusually bold interpretation of what it means to engage a community in school improvement.

Texas IAF organizing for community engagement in schools differs from the prevalent paradigms in three ways. First and most importantly, the dominant paradigms of community engagement are *accommodationist*. They assume an uncritical stance of parents toward the dominant culture in the school. In an accurate and concise summary of the literature on parental involvement in schools, Joyce Epstein has identified the five major forms of partnerships that exist between schools and parents. One emphasizes the "positive home conditions" parents can provide to support their children's learning; a second stresses the importance of school communication with parents about children's academic progress; a third seeks to use parents as volunteers in school activities; a fourth teaches parents how to monitor

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(New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986);. Susan Moore Johnson, *Teachers at Work: Achieving Success in Our Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), pp. 106-147; and Michelle Fine, *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

and assist their own children at home; and a fifth stresses parental involvement in "decision making, governance, and advocacy." While the fifth form shares affinities with Texas IAF organizations' work with parental engagement, its foreshortened notion of political participation, its separation of community issues from school issues, and its lack of grounding in community bases such as religious institutions limits its conceptual utility as a model to describe Texas IAF educational collaborations.[6]

The overall trajectory of parental engagement in Texas IAF collaborations is *radically different* from the prevailing paradigms of parental involvement. Most paradigms are restricted to roles that parents can play in supporting their children's learning: parents learn how to support the school's curriculum or how to bake cookies for fundraising for new curtains or computers. Parental involvement in these supportive roles is one part of the Texas

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[6] The best recent research on parental involvement includes Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, *Worlds Apart: Relationships Between Families and Schools* (New York: Basic, 1978); Reginald Clark, *Family Life and School Achievement: Why Poor Black Children Succeed or Fail* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Comer, *School Power*; A. Henderson, *The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parental Involvement and Student Achievement* (Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1987); Michael R. Williams, *Neighborhood Organizing for Urban School Reform* (New York: Teachers College, 1989); Annette Lareau, *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* (Philadelphia: Falmer, 1989); Nancy Feyl Chavkin, ed., *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1993); Joyce L. Epstein, "School and Family Partnerships," in M.C. Alkin, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1139-1151; Norm Fruchter, Anne Galletta, and J. Lynne White, *New Directions in Parent Involvement* (Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, Inc., 1992); J.William Rioux and Nancy Berla, *Innovations in Parent and Family Involvement* (Princeton Junction, NJ: Eye on Education, 1993); Barbara Schneider and James S. Coleman, eds., *Parents, Their Children, and Schools* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993). The quotes are from Epstein, "School and Family Partnerships," pp. 1146-1147.

IAF collaboration, but it is inextricably interwoven with a larger agenda promoting the cultivation of political leadership in low-income communities. Political leadership, as understood in Texas IAF organizations, consists of a number of factors, including the ability to identify social problems, skill in translating vague grievances into concrete political issues, and skill in coalition building, implementing change, and evaluation. The deeply political nature of Texas IAF school collaboratives warrants a terminological distinction between *accommodationist* forms of parental *involvement* and *transformational* forms of parental *engagement*. Parental *involvement*--as practiced in most schools and reflected in the research literature--avoids issues of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture. Parental *engagement* views parents as citizens in the fullest sense--change agents who can transform inner city schools and neighborhoods.[7]

To teach parents how to become active as citizens in issues involving education involves an immense paradigm shift for parents, teachers, and administrators. However much the public may want and demand systemic changes in its schools, much of the impetus for change regularly becomes defused and routinized in the form of prepackaged programs which are added to the school's curriculum without transforming its underlying culture and organization. The Texas IAF has a critique of education and society that systematically avoids such counterproductive efforts. According to Pearl Ceasar, a Texas IAF organizer in

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[7] Cortés, "Reweaving the Fabric," p. 298. I am indebted to Elsy Fierro-Suttmiller, a Texas IAF organizer in El Paso, for making the sharp conceptual distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement. A valuable albeit foreshortened analysis of parental engagement may be found in Michael R. Williams, *Neighborhood Organizing for Urban School Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1989).

the Rio Grande Valley, "We move schools into the power arena rather than just creating programs. In fact, our real work isn't about creating programs. It's about educating parents, teachers, and principals to deal with the political realities of the city in terms of power." Once parents, teachers, and principals understand certain elementary political realities, organizers contend, they can truly begin to become active and effective in advancing the interests of young people and their schools and neighborhoods. They can then make the transition from encouraging parental *involvement* to initiating and sustaining parental *engagement* with the school and community.

A second distinctive aspect of the Texas IAF's work in school concerns its institutional base in neighborhood churches. Perhaps because a vocal minority of Americans have trampled upon the principle of the separation of church and state, many Americans have come to hold that religious institutions should play no role in improving public education. The Texas IAF, on the other hand, holds that religious institutions--which are our country's strongest voluntary associations--represent an untapped social resource which can mentor young people and complement the work of parents and teachers while respecting the independence of the public schools. By enhancing collaboration between religious institutions, families, and schools, the Texas IAF hopes to rebuild the fabric of community which has atrophied as our society has become more mobile and more saturated with marketplace values.

A third important facet of the philosophy of education advanced by the Texas IAF organizations concerns the explicit intention of their leadership to generate social capital. "Our broad-based organizations are trying to build, expand, and agitate the social capital that

is imbedded in the networks of human relationships," Texas IAF executive director Ernesto Cortés has written. "Social capital is not a familiar term in the current debate, but it is as crucial to the resolution of crises and the alleviation of poverty as the other kinds of capital we already understand." Cortés has made explicit reference to James Coleman's work on public, Catholic, and non-Catholic private schools and has sought to draw out its implications for Texas IAF organizers and leaders in countless leadership training sessions.[8]

Texas IAF organizations self-consciously promote social capitalization through a richly variegated grass-roots strategy. House meetings of small groups of citizens build social capital between hitherto isolated neighbors as housewives and blue-collar workers begin to understand that issues they have conceived as personal problems are social and systemic in nature. Individual "one-on-one's" and home visits of IAF leaders and organizers develop social capital between a school's teachers, students, parents, and neighbors as the community begins a process of dialogue and evaluation about the quality of education in the community. Parents' assemblies and the groundwork which leads up to them build social capital between public officials and community members who successfully attack the community's most pressing problems. The Texas IAF also builds social capital within institutions, such as schools and churches, by helping those who are engaged with them to develop more creative ways of sustaining dialogue, transmitting information, implementing action plans, and evaluating their results.

The Texas IAF's approach to school reform represents a unique philosophy and practice of education among the multiple efforts to improve schools which now animate

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[8] Cortés, "Reweaving the Fabric," pp. 305-307.

American society. It is an approach which first and foremost engages the community to cultivate local political leadership to enhance education. A key feature of the Texas IAF's work in schools in regards to community development is organizers' tenacious insistence on the capacity enhancement of indigenous community leaders rather than paid organizers or social work professionals. Texas IAF leaders and organizers advocate the transformation of factory schools into communities of learners and pursue their goals through a constant convocation of small group meetings, "one-on-one" conversations with potential community leaders, large group assemblies, and massive public "accountability sessions" which compel elected officials to deliver on campaign promises.

Building Social Capital in San Antonio

San Antonio is unlike any city in either Texas or the nation in that its IAF organizations are so powerful that they are consulted by the mayor and city council on virtually every major piece of legislation which can impact the city. The oldest Texas (and national) IAF organization, Communities Organized for Public Services (COPS), has over two decades of successful experience in urban politics and has achieved a national reputation as the country's best example of effective community organizing. Thanks to its efforts, over seven hundred million dollars of federal, state, and local funds have been invested in public goods projects in working class neighborhoods in San Antonio that traditionally have been used to enhance San Antonio's downtown. In particular, drainage, flood control, lighting, and street improvement funds have been effectively steered by COPS towards its neighborhoods. COPS' younger sister organization in San Antonio, the Metro Alliance, was not founded until 1989; because it was not as multifaceted in its initial outreach, the Metro Alliance has been

able to focus more intensively on educational issues than COPS. Each organization draws on large congregational bases, with twenty-eight churches in COPS and thirty-seven in the Metro Alliance. The Catholic archbishop for the archdiocese of San Antonio is a tenacious defender of the work of COPS and Metro Alliance and is one of only six members on the national board of trustees of the IAF.[9]

San Antonio is a city in which community-based organizations have not simply taken first steps to reform one or two inner city schools, but have introduced systemic reforms that are radically reshaping the experience of growing up in working class neighborhoods. COPS and Metro Alliance have opened up new avenues to higher education for inner city students, increased neighborhood safety, created close to one hundred after-school programs in inner city schools, persuaded banks to provide low-interest mortgage loans to low-income citizens, and created an ambitious job training program. Each of their programs has emerged out of the identification of a direct need in working-class communities, and each program endeavors to address the major dilemmas of low-income urban Americans--from quality employment to reduced crime to home ownership to parental engagement with the school.

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[9] On the role of Texas IAF organizations in San Antonio, see Sanders' "Communities Organized for Public Service"; Skerry, *Mexican-Americans*, and Johnson, Booth, and Harris, *The Politics of San Antonio*. On the amount of funds raised for inner city improvements, see Ernie Cortés, "Reflections on the Catholic Tradition of Family Rights," in John Coleman, ed., *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought* (New York: Orbis, 1991), p. 157. COPS is unique among Texas IAF organizations in that it consists wholly of alliances between Catholic churches. To build a more ecumenical base for community organizing, San Antonians began two other groups in the 1980s called the East Side Alliance and the Metropolitan Congregational Alliance. Those two groups combined in 1989 to form the Metro Alliance.

COPS was founded in 1974 and in its first decade it had little to do with public school issues. In 1984, however, Texas IAF organizations actively supported House Bill 72, legislation in the Texas congress which increased school funding by $2.8 billion, improved the student teacher ratio, and substantially improved academic achievement throughout the state. Texas IAF organizers and leaders learned that their members were keenly interested in public education as a result of their effort. They then slowly began exploring the challenging nature of inner city school reform.[10]

The first Texas IAF organization to experience a dramatic success in school reform was not in San Antonio, but its victory had a dramatic effect on all of the local organizations. In the mid-1980s the Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT) catalyzed parental engagement and boosted academic achievement at hitherto crisis-ridden Morningside Middle School in South Fort Worth. ACT leaders and organizers taught parents the citizenship skills they needed to close down stores which sold alcohol to underaged youth and apartments which were used for drug dealing. Jefferson Davis High School in Houston also showed signs of dramatic improvement in community engagement and academic achievement in the late 1980s as a result of a collaboration with another IAF group, The Metropolitan Organization (TMO).

Intending to learn from and push TMO's success to higher levels, leaders and organizers with COPS and Metro Alliance used their ties to Mayor Henry Cisneros and the business community to create an Education Partnership in San Antonio which provided funding for higher education to graduates from eight of the city's most troubled higher

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[10] Ronald F. Ferguson, "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal of Legislation*, vol. 28, 1991, pp. 465-491.

school. In the first five years of the Partnership, the drop-out rate at those eight schools fell from nineteen percent to eight percent. In 1988, only nineteen percent of students in those schools qualified for Education Partnership awards; by 1994 that figure had leaped to over sixty percent. As a result of the Partnership, over fourteen hundred inner city students have gone on to college, thereby enhancing their individual human capital. For the business leaders and leaders of the IAF organizations, social trust was developed through the successful creation of a new civic network--the Partnership--which links low-income community leaders and the coporate sector in an ongoing common enterprise. Even with the Partnership, however, COPS and Metro Alliance held back from bolder interventions into the internal dynamics of schools and the potentially rich interface between the school and the community.

It was not until the early 1990s that COPS and Metro Alliance began to become intimately involved in reconceptualizing the relationships between schools and neighborhoods. Smith Elementary School, on the East Side of San Antonio, was the first school that caught the organizations' concerted attention and served as the locus of an organizing effort. Smith is seventy-three per cent Hispanic and twenty-seven per cent African-American, with ninety-eight per cent of the students receiving free or reduced-fee lunches. Although its elegant red brick facade and neatly pillared portico reflect an architect's exquisite understanding of ordered harmony, Smith was confronted with terrible community problems in the early 1990s. All of the symptoms of a breakdown in social trust were reflected in the neighborhood, such as substance abuse, vacant homes and lots, litter, random acts of violence, and a high transient population. "My students would come to me telling me that someone in their family

had been shot, or that the family felt that they had to leave the neighborhood because they had been threatened with violence," teacher Celinda Garza remembers. "They were often so traumatized by what was going on in the community that there was no way that they could learn anything in my class." To improve the situation, Principal Sharon Eiter asked Metro Alliance to begin a series of house meetings and meetings in the school in the fall of 1991 to determine what could be done to improve the situation.

Metro Alliance leader Marcia Welch and organizer Julia Lerma played key roles in coordinating and leading the numerous meetings that autumn. Many themes were discussed by the parents, but two emerged as the most salient. First, many parents had to work until five o'clock in the evening. They worried about their children's safety walking home through the neighborhood, and they worried about the children's safety at home without adult supervision. "Our community has lots of very young children and lots of elderly people," parent Louie Brown observed, "and we were sick of tired of all of the vacant buildings occupied by people we didn't know who used them for dealing drugs. We knew we needed to do something." In addition to safety concerns, many parents had received little formal education and were frustrated with their inability to help their children with their school work. Perhaps it would be possible to create some kind of an after-school program that would give children a safe place to be until their parents came home, and would also provide them with classes that would strengthen their academic skills.

The theme of after-school classes was an important one for Smith parents and one that would play a dramatic role in recasting San Antonio's educational system. Yet far more urgent for the parents was the issue of safety. Assisted by Metro Alliance, parents and

teachers learned how to identify vacant buildings and lots in the neighborhood that violated San Antonio's code compliance laws. Parents and teachers formed teams to survey the neighborhood for dark areas that needed additional street lighting. They then met with Police Chief William Gibson to discuss their desire for added protection. "We were thrilled to find that the police were so willing to work with us," Garza recalled. "People from the Smith neighborhood had never come to them as an organized group before, and we feel going as a group made a big difference." Even before palpable results were evident on the streets of the East Side, Smith parents felt that the formation of their civic networks were creating new kinds of confidence and social trust.

Teachers and parents then planned and held a large rally at Holy Redeemer Catholic Church on 12 January 1992. The sense of anticipation and excitement at the meeting was palpable--yet so was the sense of anxiety. Eight days before the assembly an elderly parishioner from Holy Redeemer was killed while waiting for a bus; she was caught in a crossfire between rival gangs in the neighborhood. A few days later a sixteen year-old, Samuel Cunningham, was shot twice in the head by a gang and left to die on an expressway. Drug dealers angry about the possibility of losing territory had threatened parents and parishioners with reprisals if they attended the meeting.

In spite of the threats, Garza recalled, "the church was packed. All of the people who had been so afraid before came to the meeting." Over four hundred parents, teachers, principals, pastors and lay leaders attended and watched as Smith parents, Holy Redeemer parishioners, Metro Alliance leaders, and neighborhood residents bombarded the mayor, police chief, and other public officials with their grievances and challenges to improve the

neighborhood. "Education is a great concern, but first we must deal with the fear that fills our neighborhoods," Reverend Arthur Hollis of Revelation Bible Study Group said, "Children cannot study mathematics when madness and mayhem menace their neighborhoods." East Side resident Mary Johnson testified that her son was shot three times by gangs in the previous year. "Crime is on our minds," Reverend Semrad concurred, "We can't think about education until this is resolved." Would the police increase their visibility in the neighborhood, not just through reaction to crises, but also through proactive community policing? Would code compliance officers work with the parents to enforce existing codes? Would the mayor work with parents to explore the feasibility of creating an after-school program? Would the city improve lighting in the neighborhood?

Following the format of Texas IAF actions, all of the public officials who attended the meeting promised to play a role in rejuvenating the neighborhood. "I promise to work to identify additional funds for youth-oriented programs," Mayor Nelson Wolff said, "This is a priority." Police Chief William Gibson promised to help the community by adding more officers to the neighborhood, the director of Parks and Recreation promised to work with Metro Alliance to give young people programs which would keep them away from gangs, and City Councilman Frank Pierce promised to help the community to improve housing. The neighborhood audience was thrilled with both its newfound sense of unity and the public officials readiness to work with them. "We were so excited," Metro Alliance leader Marcia Welch said, "It was the first time that anything like this had happened, and it was a powerful evening for the whole community."

In the months following the Holy Redeemer assembly the city rallied its forces to accommodate the community's requests. "The city really followed through," Smith principal Sharon Eiter said, "They added police, and they added new lighting. Code compliance made a big difference. But best of all, it changed the relationship between the school and the parents. We saw how much strong support was in the community, and the parents looked at us differently because they saw that we really were interested in them. They saw that we cared about their lives and their safety."[11]

In April 1992 Smith Elementary School held a press conference, in Eiter's words, "to let the public know that the city had followed through on its commitments." Honoring the accountability of public officials who had fulfilled their promises, Metro Alliance made every effort to assure that their public officials understood that they were appreciative allies. "We were trying to show that if you do get organized, the city will listen," Eiter said, "and the public needed to know that." "We're proud of what we've achieved," Louie Brown said, "and we see a better city evolving."

Encouraged by its close cooperation with the city, Smith parents next turned to the issue of after-school programs. As with almost all working-class Americans, quality child care and education for their children in the late afternoons is a matter of utmost concern. Nearly half of American youth under eighteen are now growing up in single-parent homes in which the parent, almost invariably the mother, works full time. Only seven percent of students today come from homes with two parents in the home and only one a wage-earner,

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[11] Gilberto Reyes, Jr., "Crime-fighting plan eyed: city officials, E. Side leaders trying to turn tide on gang violence," *San Antonio Light*, 13 January 1992.

with the other parent a homekeeper. In spite of dramatic changes in students' domestic lives, public schools have been slow to adjust their schedules to their pupils' needs. Schools with strong after-school programs are much more the exception than the rule; often, urban schools charge a tuition for after-school activities.[12]

Many urban youth grow up in conditions of "unsponsored independence" in which they seek structure and recognition not from absent parents but from their peers. Unsponsored independence is a symptom of the decline of social capital that has hiterto been manifested in two-parent families. Parents have been alarmed by the rise of gangs and juvenile violence in their neighborhoods, and especially by the way that gangs have been recruiting younger and younger children into their activities. Since many working class parents received little formal education and feel handicapped in terms of their academic abilities, they expressed a strong desire to have high quality academic instruction as one part of after-school programs for their children.

To serve their clientele and the larger public interest, Metro Alliance and COPS had already organized to urge the city to fund three middle schools with after-school programs in 1991. When objections were raised about the expense of the programs, COPS and the Metro Alliance organized teachers, principals, and parents to conduct research to identify revenues for the programs. The research team found that the city's Department of Parks and Recreation had suffered over five million dollars in budget cuts in the last two years.[13]

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[12] Leon Lynn, "Building Parent Involvement," *Brief to Principals*, No. 8, Winter 1994, p. 1.

[13] "Teach Parents to Help Children," *San Antonio Express-News*, September 10, 1993.

COPS and the Metro Alliance leaders and organizers then pressured the city to restore one million dollars to the Department's budget, and integrated that request into a budget plan they had been developing over years for neighborhood development in inner city San Antonio. The plan focussed on improving housing, expanding jobs, and enforcing code compliance. To complicate matters, San Antonio has an unusually fragmented public school system; the metropolitan area is divided into eighteen separate independent school districts. COPS and Metro Alliance activists thus needed to meet with many different sets of school administrators.[14]

Galvanized by the mobilization of the Smith community, a new coalition of leaders developed within COPS and Metro Alliance who were determined to use their organizations to improve public education in San Antonio. COPS leader Maria Diaz attended "meetings upon meetings" with city council representatives and advocated with her fellow leaders that the council set a top priority on the creation of after-school programs. "Of course, the first response was 'No, there is no money,'" she stated. Yet because Mayor Nelson Wolff had set a high priority on youth in his electoral campaign--and because Metro Alliance had assured that he receive such favorable publicity after cleaning up the Smith neighborhood--Wolff agreed to open up the city's budget to work with COPS and Metro Alliance leaders to find the funds to support an expansion of after-school programs. As San Antonio began to come back from the recession in the early 1990s, funds were restored to the Department of Parks and Recreation, which were then targetted for a new "After-School Challenge Program."

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[14] On COPS' work on housing, see Sanders, "Communities Organized for Public Service."

As a result of constant grass-roots advocacy, Mayor Wolff and the San Antonio city council agreed to fund a plan proposed by COPS and the Metro Alliance for twenty free after-school programs in the 1992-1993 school year. The city allocated $14,000 to hire a staff of two after-school coordinators for each school site out of its Park and Recreations budget. Those positions were matched by a third position paid for by the school district, which also provided games and equipment for the programs. Each school worked with COPS and Metro Alliance to recruit unpaid parents to provide additional staffing for the programs, which varied based on participation from school to school.

In the first year of its funding, between one-quarter to one-third of all children in each school in San Antonio with an after-school program took advantage of the new program. Children were tutored in material that they had studied during the regular school day and participated in a host of offerings involving the arts, athletics, and the sciences. There was such vocal public support for the programs in their first year that Metro Alliance and COPS convened another large assembly of over five hundred activists in February 1993. Recognizing the widespread popularity of the after-school program, Mayor Wolff and the city council created an additional forty after-school programs for the following year. When the school year opened in August 1993, sixty schools sponsored free after-school programs for the children of San Antonio for a total cost of $1.3 million.

COPS and Metro Alliance leaders made certain that parents played a major role in shaping the after-school program in their children's school. Parents and community leaders not only helped to recruit staff, select curricula, and monitor the programs, but they also are highly visible on a day to day basis as they offer courses, provide refreshments, and serve as

teachers' aides. Some after-school programs emphasize academics, others allow children to play in a variety of organized games, and most are a blend of tutorials and recreation. In all of them, the community plays an integral role in directing the program.

In addition to providing a safe environment for the children, teachers report that the after-school program helped to improve students' attitudes towards school and academic achievement. "Students who previously hadn't done their homework began turning it in every day," according to Julia Lerma, educational organizer for the Metro Alliance. "As a result, their grades were improving, and so was their self-esteem." Laura Villanueva, a fifth-grade teacher at Woodrow Wilson Elementary, credited the after-school program with greater student and community ownership of the school: "Instead of the school being a place where students came for eight hours a day and then left, now it is *their* place, now it is *their* home."

Not only do the children benefit from the after-school program, but their parents are enthusiastic supporters. Those who have to work until the evening are relieved to know that their children are not only safe at school, but are learning. As Villanueva testified:

Time after time parents would come up to us and were so grateful that their children were *finally* getting the help that they needed to be in a safe environment and socially interact with other children. They didn't have to worry so much about their kids being at home by themselves.

Yet it would be a mistake to construe the after-school program just as a child-care program. As COPS leader Maria Diaz stated, "Our concern was that the after-school program shouldn't feel like a day-care center. We really wanted it to get the community more involved in the schools. And it *has* led to more parental involvement, and a new kind of development in the schools." Parents who teach in the after-school program testify that they have a much greater awareness of the children, teachers, and challenges in the school, and are in a better position to contribute to their children's educational development. Because the parents battled for the program in a combined effort with teachers and administrators they feel a tremendous sense of ownership of it and are determined to develop it to its full potential.

The combined efforts of COPS and the Metro Alliance have vastly improved the experience of growing up for low-income children in San Antonio. In 1994-1995 the after-school program rose to close to one hundred schools, although a major failure by the San Antonio school board to match the city's two million dollar contribution with $170,000 meant that the program did not reach the over 130 schools that COPS and Metro Alliance hoped to support. In spite of that blunder by the board, teachers such as Laura Villanueva are inspired by the after-school program and the civic energy which infuses it. "I've always prided myself on my work as a teacher," she said. "But now I see how much change we've really created, and how much potential we really have. It's not just small changes for a small number of children. We've effected change for all of San Antonio."

COPS and Metro Alliance are proud of their work creating new opportunities for higher education for low-income youth and the after-school program. In terms of social capital theory, those youth who benefit from the Education Partnership or the after-school

program are receiving additional adult sponsorship directed toward academic achievement and civic capacity. Each of those programs, however, still constitutes an addition to school culture rather than a transformation of it. To understand how IAF leaders can change the internal cultures of schools to build social capital within the school, consider two examples of internal school change.

Herff Elementary School is a preschool through second grade school with over four hundred students located in the Alamodome neighborhood of east San Antonio. Although the school is a charming turn-of-the century edifice with its original wood floors and slate blackboards remarkably intact, its neighborhood in recent years was afflicted with problems. During the day, traffic raced back and forth in the front of the school and jeopardized the safety of children. After dark there was almost no lighting and two gangs, the LA Kings and Puro Ocho, terrified residents with drive-by shootings. One evening shots were fired through the windows on the front of the school. Substance abuse was high and teachers found themselves cleaning up syringes and broken wine and beer bottles on the school grounds each morning. Gangs, drug dealers, and drug addicts occupied abandoned buildings on side streets adjacent to the school. Less than half of the parents at Herff had completed high school, more than half of its students had limited English proficiency, and virtually all of the pupils were on free or reduced-fee lunches. Parental involvement and ties to the community were close to nonexistent.

Herff Elementary School began its transformation in 1989, when Pamela Ahart Walls became principal. Whereas her predecessor had responded with resignation to the problems in the community and attempted to cover up its many problems, Walls went on the offensive.

One of her first acts was to call upon the Metro Alliance for assistance. Metro Alliance helped Walls and her faculty and parents to make house visits, to hold Walks for Success, and to challenge parents to improve their school and community. Walls also engaged the media to cover the problems at Herff and to create a momentum which would demand change. She told a reporter from the *San Antonio Express-News* about the problems at her school:

Herff is a school where we must check the grounds daily for drug paraphernalia: where parents are afraid for their children, so they don't leave until the bell rings and they are safely escorted indoors; where a gang threatened in the past to snatch a four year old and use her for satanic sacrifice; where the principals must keep Mace on her key ring for protection; where domestic violence has left blood in this very cafeteria; where children have witnessed so many negative role models that I've removed three knives from my young students in the past two days.[15]

To confront the problems, Walls and her faculty worked with Metro Alliance to convene a large parents' assembly which over five hundred parents attended in November 1992. As with Smith's assembly, public officials promised to act on parents' requests, and to act quickly. Only one week after the assembly, Herff parents won one of the key issues they had long sought to address, which was the transformation of traffic patterns in the immediate vicinity of the school.

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[15] Marty Sabota, "City officials promise to make East Side area safe for children," *San Antonio Express-News*, 11 November 1992.

A second issue that was brought before the parents' assembly concerned the community's relationship with the police. As Officer Bobbie Adams bluntly put it, "Before that assembly, everyone hated me." It was Adams' role to move into the community to arrest fathers who beat spouses and to take uncles and brothers to the police station for questioning when they were suspects in crimes. The police felt that many parents raised their children to be suspicious of and hostile to law enforcement officers.

Two parents, Rosemary Davila and Maria Rivera, led the effort to introduce community policing into their Alamodome neighborhood. They worked with Pamela Walls to recruit two officers to befriend the children at Herff. Although the police were hesitant at first, they have grown into their roles as mentors for the children and now find their frequent visits to Herff and their friendships with the children one of the favorite aspects of their work. Officer Adams, a tall African-American previously feared by the children, now visits Herff twice a week. He has developed a host of young admirers who rush up to hug him when he arrives at the school, and he enjoys collaborating with the teachers when they are developing curriculua. When teachers at Herff were working on an interdisciplinary unit on transportation, for example, Adams provided for a helicopter to land near the school so that the children could explore it up close; he also arranged for fire engines to come to the school for the children. For a unit on careers he organized a field trip to the Police Academy for the children. He has escorted field trips on foot to the nearby public library and has visited children's homes on Herff's Walks for Success. His high visibility in a protective role in the community has changed its perception of him. Parents feel safer about their children, the

children see the police in a new light, and he feels an emotional stake in the well-being of the neighborhood.

A third issue addressed by the November assembly concerned code compliance, housing, and neighborhood development in the community surrounding Herff. In the six months following the assembly more than sixteen vacant houses near Herff were demolished and long-abandoned vehicles were removed from vacant lots. Teachers such as Anita Cortez and administrators such as Anita O'Neal who have worked on the Code Compliance Committee have developed a detailed knowledge of their pupils' community and the problems experienced by children in their neighborhood.

In their most sweeping and systemic effort, parents and teachers from Herff played a key role in designing a comprehensive proposal with Metro Alliance to protect their neighborhood from commercial developers. The Alamodome sports facility, directly on the other side of a nearby interstate highway, could easily have spawned a limitless profusion of minimalls and gas stations to serve consumers from the suburbs. "This area was already downgraded before the dome got here," Metro Alliance leader Claude Black observed, "Ninty percent of the business owners did not live in the community and therefore had no real ties with the people who live here." Metro Alliance worked closely with San Antonio's city council to protect the residential character of the Herff neighborhood.

San Antonio's powerful business elite resisted the notion that a small working-class community could circumscribe commercial growth in the proximity of the Alamodome. In February 1993 the Alamodome East Property Owners Association sued the city of San Antonio while it was developing the Alamodome Neighborhood Plan in cooperation with

Metro Alliance. Without any community opposition the property owners would have profitted but the precarious fabric of the community would have suffered further and perhaps irreversible decline. Metro Alliance continued to plan with the city for residential zoning, the property owners lost their lawsuit, and in December 1993 the city council put the motion for residential zoning to a vote. With City Hall packed with 150 Metro Alliance leaders, the city council voted unanimously to pass the resolution. "We saved the neighborhood!" Pamela Walls affirmed. Parents who were thinking of moving out of the neighborhood, such as Rosemary Davila, have now decided to stay to contribute to the new vitality.[16]

Change in Herff's neighborhood has stimulated change within its classrooms. Pamela Walls has used discretionary funds to acquire consultants who can teach Herff teachers how to plan, instruct, and evaluate interdisciplinary units, and the result has been "richer, longer, in-depth study" of units from multifacted angles which enable children with different learning styles to participate easily in the curriculum. Reflecting the dynamic interaction between the school and community issues, Herff teachers have planned a wide range of interdisciplinary curricular units on housing and shelter with their students. "We're integrating the curriculum and the community," Julia Lerma commented, "and that's another way to get parents involved."

Education at Herff has changed not only for the children and their teachers. Herff's staff has created adult education classes for parents in English as a second language and basic education, as well as a program to earn general equivalency degrees. A portion of Herff's

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[16] Loydean Thomas, "City zones Alamodome area residential: Neighbors hail move as a way to give 12-block section a new chance for life," *San Antonio Express-News*, 17 December 1993.

library has been turned into a parents' center, and to give parents full insight into the ongoing development of the schools, Walls invites parents to attend staff development programs. From her perspective, the presence of parents in staff development workshops "keeps teachers from going too deeply into jargon. It really makes one stop and make sure that everyone understands all of the issues that are being raised." More importantly, however, Walls believes that "it really doesn't matter what we would do with the curriculum if we didn't have the parents involved" because "teachers must address the issue of what parents can do in the home to enhance units of instruction." It is Walls' conviction that simply focussing on what happens in the school, while neglecting the home life of children, might make for interesting workshops but is ineffective if one wants high academic achievement for the children who attend Herff. In Walls' experience, including parents in staff development workshops is particularly important because workshop leaders will often model for the teachers ways in which they can be most effective in communicating with children, and most Herff parents have not had the opportunity to pursue higher education and to reflect upon all of the issues involved in stimulating children's cognitive growth.

For parents such as Maria Rivera, participation in staff development workshops gives her the chance not only to understand current developments in instruction and curriculum, but also to enhance teachers' awareness of their pupils as whole individuals with a home life outside of the school in the foreground. "There are schools where it would be a really big deal to have parents involved in staff development ," Pamela Walls says, "but Herff has evolved in such a way that no one sees it as an issue." Including parents in staff

development has removed the mystique of teacher training and expanded the educational mission of the school into the homes of the children.

The result of so much social capitalization has buoyed the community's spirits. "Leaders from the Metro Alliance encouraged me to speak to the mayor about our neighborhood's needs," Maria Rivera says, "and I was terrified at first. But Julia Lerma, the organizer, made me feel very comfortable. We ended up writing my presentation at midnight while lying on my living room floor and eating ice cream! And the presentation went very well." Rivera has attended staff development workshops, organized Walks for Success, attended Metro Alliance sessions on preparing students for state-administered tests, and is an enthusiastic supporter of the school's after-school program. She has travelled to Houston to hear Howard Gardner speak at Texas IAF conventions; she felt that his theory of multiple intelligences validated her own observations of the different learning styles of her children. As a result of all of her work in the school she has switched churches and her family now attends Saint Michael's Catholic Church, which has housed summer programs for Herff children. As a result of the engagement of parents such as Rivera, Pamela Walls feels confirmed in her conviction that "This school really *is* the center of the community."

As Smith and Herff discovered new ways to connect to their communities through their work with Metro Alliance even skeptical educators who had been hostile to COPS and Metro Alliance--who saw them as combative, intrusive political organizations--found themselves intrigued by the new school collaboratives. Richard Alvarado, principal of Beacon Hill Elementary School had grown up in San Antonio and had criticized his parents

for their support of COPS. As a high school and college student, he deplored COPS' disruptive, attention-getting interruption of normal business routines in its first protest actions.

In spite of those early impressions, Alvarado knew that Saint Anne's, a parish church right next to Beacon Hill, was a member of Metro Alliance, and he knew that a positive relationship to the church and its congregation could only help his work as a principal. As a consequence he agreed to a series of meetings with Metro Alliance leaders and organizers in the early 1990s, in which he learned about programs such as the Education Partnership, the After-School Challenge Grant, and the ongoing work at Smith and Herff. Those conversations piqued his curiosity. "I recognized that I didn't know anything about community organizing and that acquiring those skills was essential if I was going to increase parental involvement at Beacon Hill," he said.

Increasing parental participation was not the only issue that Alvarado faced as principal of Beacon Hill. Close to one hundred percent of his students were on free or reduced-fee lunches. He has six hundred students in his school, but only one bathroom for boys and one for girls. Twenty of his twenty-nine classrooms are in ten temporary buildings where a playground should be. Alvarado knew that his children did not have the same opportunities that most American children have, and he was eager to do all he could to improve their circumstances.

Alvarado first tried to have meetings for parents at the school to begin building better ties to the community. Those meetings were failures; almost no parents came. Drawing on its familiarity with this problem, Metro Alliance helped Alvarado to reconceptualize his outreach. The new strategy was to set up "block meetings," in which all of the blocks in his

school attendance zone held meetings in a parent's home to learn what the parents' major concerns were about their children and the school. Teachers telephoned parents to ask them if they would agree to host meetings. Once they had set up a schedule, Alvarado and a small cluster of teachers and parents moved from home to home soliciting parents' ideas and doing whatever they could to encourage parents to advance their children's educations.

For Alvarado, the block meetings were a time of excitement and tremendous personal growth. He recalled,

We arrived with refreshments, and we would meet anywhere--on the front lawn if there was nice weather, or in the living room, and the parents had it all organized. One mother would look after the children while we all talked about ways we could help the children. I saw that what we were doing was so badly wanted and needed--it was just that the parents didn't want to come to the school! And after the meeting I'd get phone calls in my office from people saying, "I want the meeting to be held at my home the next time!"

After the block meetings the parents held a number of meetings with the mayor, the chief of police, and the director of Parks and Recreation. They then worked to hold a large public assembly at Beacon Hill in October 1992.

Over five hundred parents turned out for that first large assembly at the school, attended by Mayor Nelson Wolff. The parents' attention was clearly focussed on the presence of vacant buildings and a bunkhouse occupied by transients in the neighborhood. Parents complained about drug dealers and users who inhabited the buildings, individuals who defecated publicly in front of their children while they walked to and from school, and

sidewalks littered with syringes. "The parents and children were frightened, because one of the worst buildings was right on a major pathway on the way to school," Alvarado recalled. Rebecca Schwartz was in the middle of teaching her third-grade class one morning when a homeless man wandered into the class and asked her for money. Other vagrants loitered in the restrooms and frightened children when they need to use them.

Before their assembly Alvarado and the parents had tried to get code compliance officers to board up the vacant buildings or at least to pledge to close the buildings quickly. Parents such as Juanita Zamarripa and teachers such as Norma Vinton covered the neighborhood noting buildings which violated the code and informed the appropriate officials. Regrettably, the officers refused to make any greater commitment than to attend to the buildings as quickly as circumstances allowed.

As a result of the city's intransigence, Alvarado and the parents decided to go to the public. They invited the media to film their assembly and to tour the buildings with them. They found syringes, pornography, and a host of filthy conditions that should be nowhere in the proximity of elementary school children--and the television stations projected it all in living color on the ten o'clock news. Mayor Nelson Wolff and other public officials promised action. The very next day code compliance officers boarded up the buildings.[17]

For Alvarado, the rapidity of response of those code compliance officers after the negative media coverage "completely blew the door open" at Beacon Hill. "I think that's when the parents really understood the power of an informed and organized constituency," he

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[17] Gilberto Reyes, Jr., "City Pledge Clean-Up Aid," *San Antonio Light*, May 27, 1992.

said. Seeking to capitalize on that momentum, Alvarado and his staff have strongly promoted political education at Beacon Hill. Alvarado had noted that electoral participation in his school zone was abysmally low--as low as ten percent in some elections. As a result, Beacon Hill has mobilized on a school-wide basis to educate students about how the political process works, to conduct voting drives in the neighborhood, and to educate parents about the importance of their electoral engagement. Educating the school and the community is a dual mandate at Beacon Hill, and Alvarado hopes that a new level of citizenship awareness, both in terms of rights and responsibilities, is changing a culture of disengagement in the community.

Within the school, Alvarado feels that "the classroom looks totally different." Like Herff, his school has focussed on the development of interdisciplinary themes in recent years. Part of the pleasure and motivating power of interdisicplinary approaches to curriculum involves the myriad topics that teams of teachers can select and shape into curriculum units. At Beacon Hill, elections were one such interdisciplinary unit; another one was birds, which a traditional teacher introduced with such gusto that she and her students painted the entire front foyer of the school with bright representations of exotic birds. Other topics such as housing, health, and community are ongoing interdisciplinary themes which are helping to weave together the worlds of the school and the community.

Test Scores

Test score results offer one limited means of addressing issues of academic achievement. Every year, public school students in Texas are required to take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, which seeks to evaluate students' reading,

writing, and mathematics skills. The results from the Alliance Schools initiatives in the schools indicate modest improvements in Smith, substantial gains at Flanders, and dramatic improvements at Beacon Hill. The following are the results for the schools since the inception of the Alliance Schools program. The scores identify the percentage of students in each school who passed all three sections of the TAAS; the test is administered to third, fourth, and fifth graders in the spring of each year. (TAAS scores are available for 1990-1992 in the schools, but the test was dramatically different in content and given at different times of the year to different cohorts of students. The Texas Education Agency emphasizes that the scores from before and after 1992 are not comparable.)[18]

School	Year		
	1993	1994	1995
Smith Elementary	20.6	17.3	24.7
Beacon Hill Elementary	21.1	27.9	40.3
Flanders Elementary	15.4	28.8	28.1

Analysis

Community policing, after-school programs, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and accessible college educations are all part of an integrated, systemic strategy by COPS and Metro Alliance to build social capital in the schools and neighborhoods of San Antonio.

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[18] In 1993 the TAAS test was given to third and fourth graders only at the elementary level. In 1994 and 1995 fifth graders also took the test.

When their efforts are successful, the IAF organizations create virtuous civic circles among schools, neighborhoods, and congregations in which San Antonians visit one another, learn from each others' experiments, and encourage each other to continue reinventing their methods of educating and engaging the community. The problems the city still faces are formidable. "We still have plenty of drugs, alcoholism, and gang violence in our communities," Father Wauters said, "but little by little, people are seeing that they can play a role in rebuilding the community. They see that our community organizations are having an impact, and that's why we get such high turn-out when we meet at our schools. As for the kids, what they see is that their school, their parents, and their church all care about the same things: a good education, good jobs, and good housing. For those of us who are pastors, our self-interest is met, too, because a stable community means a stable congregation."

In spite of the gains of COPS and Metro Alliance in San Antonio, however, it should be clear that there are several limitations to the efficacy of Texas IAF organizations in school. A first and major constraint resides in the social base in religious institutions. While any individual can participate in Texas IAF organizations, individuals who are nonchurched are less likely to find the same kind of commitment to the kind of community organizing that characterizes the Texas IAF as those whose churches are dues-paying members. While a majority of Americans see themselves as affiliated with religious institutions, forty-three percent do not. Among ethnic minorities, roughly three quarters of Hispanic Catholics are not practicing and twenty-two percent of blacks are unchurched.[19]

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[19] Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Harmony, 1993), p. 9, pp. 138-139; Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, p. 160.

A second limitation of Texas IAF school organizing occurs at the classroom level, where the quality of interaction between teachers and students is critical and where Texas IAF leaders and organizers are on *terra incognita*. Most Texas IAF leaders and organizers are novices unfamiliar with the history or philosophies of education, the nuances of instruction and learning, or the various modalities of assessment. Since so much of the work of school improvement involves the continuing education of teachers, it should be clear that Texas IAF work in schools is just one additional contributing to an ongoing dynamic of change, and not a totalistic recipe for overhauling education.

A third limitation has to do with the restricted and uneven development of the school collaboratives in San Antonio. The most successful undertakings to date have transpired in elementary schools, where the small number of students and teachers, the proximity of the school to the home, and the simplicity of the academic work for adults all contribute to enhance parental and community engagement. In spite of the fact that the first school that really catalyzed the Texas IAF's work in education was a middle school, community organizing in secondary schools proves to be a much greater challenge for Texas IAF organizations. Middle schools and high schools typically are organized in ways that destroy social capital. Students have six or seven teachers who teach them; teachers change every year or sometimes every semester, and the sheer number of students (sometimes numbering close to four thousand) make deep interpersonal ties almost impossible. While one important part of the current school restructuring movement is to break larger schools into smaller clusters or house systems, most urban secondary schools have been slow to change their internal organization--if they have made any efforts in that direction at all.

In spite of these limitations, the work of the Texas IAF in public schools and inner city neighborhoods in San Antonio is of vital importance for the current rapid development of social capital theory. The work suggests that community-based organizations working out of a radical and urban populist political tradition can be vital instruments of social capitalization in public schools in the central cities. Texas IAF organization build social capital through the leadership development of indigenous community residents who are talented in many areas but never received effective citizenship education. By teaching those residents the nuts-and-bolts of grass-roots politics--identifying neighborhood problems, translating them into specific political issues, convening house meetings, and building the social relationships which can promote and sustain change--Texas IAF organizations build social trust, generalized reciprocity, and commitments of mutual accountability. In the process they lay the groundwork for the molding of a new and more democratic civic culture.

Before closing this essay, I should like to underline a point touched on briefly above. Unlike Saul Alinsky, who was largely indifferent to the theological and ethical dimension of religious institutions, the contemporary IAF explicitly grounds itself in Judeo-Christian and democratic republican traditions that emphasize "solidarity with the poor" and the conviction that "extreme inequality threatens community." In IAF training sessions throughout Texas, Southwest regional director Ernie Cortés uses those traditions to criticize the decline of social capital in the contemporary United States and to challenge audiences to rebuild their social ties to enhance their schools and communities. The fact that the IAF tends to be issues-oriented and pragmatic in its daily organizing activity should not obscure the reality that its

political practice is embedded in and draws inspiration from a dual religious and political tradition.

The Texas IAF's work in schools, expanded throughout the state in a network of over sixty Alliance Schools as of this writing, challenges us to reflect anew about educators' potential to engage parents and teachers in multifaceted, horizontally organized, and deeply democratic civic cultures. Rather than fall prey to an inward-looking parochialism, the Alliance Schools are finding ways to bridge the interests of the local community with the needs of our great metropolitan areas in a period of economic globalization. They provide intriguing laboratories for developing and experimenting with strategies of social capitalization in central city schools and neighborhoods throughout the nation.